

Muharraq, Al Khaldiya learn Asian rivals

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Bahrain clubs Muharraq and Al Khaldiya were handed their group-stage opponents for the 2026-27 AFC Champions League Two following yesterday's draw in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Reigning Nasser bin Hamad Premier League champions Muharraq were drawn in Group B alongside UAE side Al Jazira, Iran's Gol Gohar Sirjan and Turkmenistan's FK Arkadag.

League runners-up Al Khaldiya, meanwhile, face a challenging Group A featuring UAE outfit Al Wahda, Uzbekistan's FC Nasaf and Kuwait SC.

The 32-team competition is split evenly between West and East Asia, with four groups in each region. Teams will face each of their group opponents home and away, with the group stage running from September 15 to December 9.

Muharraq enter the competition as one of five former champions in this season's field and will be looking to improve on their showing last term.

The Red Wolves finished third in Group A in 2025-26, collecting seven points from two wins, one draw and three defeats as they narrowly missed out on the knockout stage.

Their upcoming campaign will mark the return of Bahraini coach Isa Al Saadoun, who has replaced Portuguese manager Fernando Manuel de Jesus Santos.

Al Saadoun previously managed Muharraq and returns to the club five years after guiding the Red Wolves to the AFC Cup title in 2021.

His side have been preparing for the new season at a training camp in Turkey, where they



Muharraq officials Abdulla Al Buainain and Mohammed Yaseen attend the draw

played four friendlies.

They suffered a 2-1 defeat to UAE side Fujairah before successive 1-0 losses against Egypt's ZED FC and Algeria's ES Sétif, and concluded their camp with a 1-1 draw against Qatar's Muaither Sports Club.

Al Khaldiya will also begin their Asian campaign under new management, with Croatian Goran Tomic succeeding

Tunisian coach Lassaad Chabbi.

They will be hoping to go one better than last season after also finishing third in their group, recording one win, three draws and two defeats for six points.

Al Khaldiya previously reached the round of 16 in the inaugural AFC Champions League Two campaign in 2024-25.

Like Muharraq, they have

spent part of their pre-season in Turkey, drawing 1-1 with Fujairah, losing 2-1 to Kuwait's Kazma and playing out a 2-2 draw with Al Salmiya.

Tomic's side then ended their friendly programme on a winning note, edging Kuwaiti outfit Qadsia 3-2 in their final pre-season test.

The top two teams from each of the eight groups will progress to the round of 16, which is scheduled to take place from February 9 to 18 next year.

The quarter-finals will follow from March 2 to 18, with the semi-finals scheduled for April 6 to 14 and the final set for May 15.

Japanese side Gamba Osaka enter the new campaign as defending champions after defeating Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr 1-0 in the 2025-26 final.

Muharraq will be seeking another deep continental run as one of Bahrain's most decorated clubs in Asian football, having twice won the competition in its previous guise as the AFC Cup, lifting the trophy in 2008 and 2021.

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
AL WAHDA	AL JAZIRA	AL TAIYEBIN FC	AL HUSSEIN
FC NASAF	GOLDOHAR SIRJAN	AL RAYHAN	AL SHORTA
KUWAIT SC	MUHAARRAQ	AL FASALY	AL SEER
AL KHALDIYA	ARKADAG	AL NAHDA	EAST BENGAL FC
GROUP E	GROUP F	GROUP G	GROUP H
FC SEIKO	PERSELA UNITED	MACHIDA ZELVIA	GRANQUIN
MELBOURNE VICTORY	BO PATUM LUT	SHANGHAI SHENHUA	KUOWING CITY
THE COMO - VIRET	LUAN CITY SAILORS	PER QUAY RENG	KITCHEE
WINNER AFC TWO FC (EAST)	TAI PO	TAMPINES ROVERS	PHANOM PENH CROWN

All eight groups following the AFC Champions League Two draw

Youth cagers eye last eight



Bahrain duo Onoduenyi and Abdulkadir during their group-phase finale

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Bahrain will look to book their place in the FIBA U18 Asia Cup quarter-finals when they face Chinese Taipei tomorrow at 11am Bahrain time in Ahmedabad, India.

The kingdom's youth men enter the qualification play-off on the back of an impressive 92-68 victory over Syria, which secured second place in Group B with two wins from three games.

Salman Ramadhan's side will now face Group A third-placers Chinese Taipei at the Veer Savarkar Indoor Stadium, with a place in Friday's last eight at stake.

Bahrain opened their campaign with a 74-68 victory over Lebanon before suffering an 86-42 defeat to group winners New Zealand.

They responded strongly against Syria, leading by as many as 31 points and dominating the second half 52-29 after their opponents had cut the deficit to just one at 40-39 by half-time.

Somto Patrick Onoduenyi and Hassan Abdulkadir once again spearheaded the victory, with both recording double-doubles.

Onoduenyi produced 26

points, 14 rebounds and five blocks, while Abdulkadir finished with 21 points, 12 boards and two blocks.

Mujtaba Mahmood Rayyan also played a key role with 17 points, including five three-pointers, while Ali Hussain Mohamed added 10.

Chinese Taipei head into tomorrow's encounter after finishing third in Group A with a 1-2 record.

The six-time Asian medalists suffered a heavy 110-58 defeat to defending champions Australia in their final group game, having previously done enough to secure their place in the qualification play-offs.

Carter Coleman has emerged as a major threat for the East Asian side and was their lone player in double figures against Australia, scoring 18 points while adding five rebounds and two assists.

Chinese Taipei will be aiming to improve on their 12th-place finish at the previous edition in 2024, while Bahrain are seeking to reach the quarter-finals and move a step closer to a place at next year's Fiba U19 Basketball World Cup.

The four semi-finalists in Ahmedabad will secure qualification for the global championship.

Stephen Loman brings Cordillera warrior spirit to Pula Arena

Manama

Stephen "The Sniper" Loman has spent years carrying the name of the Cordillera far beyond the mountains of northern Luzon.

Born into the Ifugao community and shaped by highlands that rise to nearly 2,928 meters, the Filipino hard-hitter grew up far from the city lights of Metro Manila.

The rugged terrain helped forge the fighter he is today, instilling resilience through adversity, composure under pressure, and an instinctive refusal to back down.

Now, Loman will bring that warrior ethos to a place where combatants once faced one another before roaring crowds.

On September 5, he returns to BRAVE Combat Federation for the first time in five years, facing Georgian rising star Lasha Abramishvili in the co-main event of BRAVE CF 108 at the iconic Pula Arena in Croatia.

It will be Loman's first appearance in Croatia and the first time a Cordilleran fighter competes inside the ancient



amphitheater.

"I'm very excited to fight in Croatia for the first time. I've competed in many countries throughout my career, but this will be a completely different experience. Competing in a location with so much history makes this opportunity even more special," Loman said.

His career has already carried him across continents and into some of the most prominent venues, including the Singapore Indoor Stadium, Gachibowli

Indoor Stadium in India, Mall of Asia Arena in the Philippines, SSE Arena in Northern Ireland, and Khalifa Sports City Arena in Bahrain.

Pula Arena, however, offers a backdrop unlike any he has encountered.

Its story stretches back nearly two millennia. A wooden structure first occupied the site during the reign of Emperor Augustus before the monumental stone amphitheater was developed during the Flavian

dynasty in the first century CE under Emperors Vespasian and Titus.

The structure became a stage for gladiatorial contests and major public gatherings, drawing immense crowds to spectacles that would become part of Roman history.

Much of that grandeur remains.

Pula Arena is one of the best-preserved Roman amphitheaters in the world, with its limestone exterior, four side towers, and three classical architectural orders remarkably intact. It remains one of Croatia's most celebrated landmarks and a striking reminder of an era when gladiators entered the arena with thousands of eyes fixed upon them.

At BRAVE CF 108, Loman will cross that threshold under the rules of modern mixed martial arts.

"I know the history of Pula Arena, and that makes this fight even more meaningful. Warriors fought here centuries ago, and now I have the chance to compete in the same place in a different era. I want to honor

that history by giving the fans a performance they will remember," Loman said.

The significance of the occasion reaches far beyond the amphitheater.

The Cordillera is home to several distinct Indigenous tribes, including the Ifugao, Kalinga, Bontoc, Ibaloi, Kankanaey, and Isneg. While each community has its own language, customs, and traditions, their histories are bound by a fierce determination to protect their ancestral domains.

For more than 300 years, Cordilleran communities resisted Spanish colonization, defending their ancestral lands and gold-rich territories from outside control. The formidable highlands became a natural bastion, helping preserve their independence long after much of the Philippines had fallen under Spanish rule.

Loman is proudly Ifugao. Now based in Baguio City, he has carried that identity from the highlands to the international stage while building a legacy of his own.

"The Sniper" became the

inaugural BRAVE CF Bantamweight World Champion and successfully defended his crown four times during a remarkable 1,179-day reign.

After five years away, Loman will reunite with BRAVE CF as one of its pioneering figures, bringing the character of his homeland into a setting steeped in the memory of warriors from another age.

"I'm proud to be a Cordilleran. Wherever I compete, I carry my people and my heritage with me. Our ancestors were fiercely independent, and they protected their land and way of life for generations," he said.

"That determination is part of me, and I want to show the world what a Cordilleran warrior is all about."

Pula Arena has endured for centuries, preserving the memory of those who once entered its gates to battle.

On September 5, Loman will walk through those same gates carrying the pride of the Cordillera and the opportunity to etch his name into the story of one of the world's most historic arenas.